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Studi in onore di Giorgio Chittolini**

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## ***The medieval Italian city and the “civilizing process”***

by John M. Najemy

Norbert Elias's famous thesis concerning the “civilizing process” attributes the social disciplining of European elites chiefly to the environment and influence of early modern royal and princely courts, which, so he believed, functioned as schools of good manners within the political framework of centralizing and absolutist states<sup>1</sup>. Both parts of Elias's construct have been considered problematic: “civilizing”, which implies that Europe, since the sixteenth century, became more civilized than medieval Europe had been, with the further implication that other parts of the world remain less civilized even now; and “process”, which suggests that advances in European civility were linear and cumulative<sup>2</sup>. It is surely one of the great ironies of modern scholarship that Elias's grand vision of the “civilizing process” was published on the eve (1939) of the most horrific demonstration of the fragility and superficiality of European civility. Perhaps the irony was intended, since Elias, a member of the Jewish Youth Movement in his school days<sup>3</sup>, could have had few illusions about the European fascisms, particularly Nazism, of the 1930s.

There were of course major changes in the behavioral codes of Europe's upper classes. But was it only – or even chiefly – in the early modern princely courts that Europe's elite classes learned self-restraint and internalized the imperatives of moderation, decorum, and civility? Some historians have relocated the beginnings of the “civilizing process” to the medieval period. Dilwyn Knox, for example, has argued that «the origins of European civility» (to quote from the title of one of his essays) lay in monastic codes of conduct that found influential expression as early as the twelfth century, particularly in Hugh of St. Victor's *De institutione novitiorum*. The famous conduct books of the Renaissance, Knox claims, were a «secular adaptation» of

<sup>1</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, transl. E. Jephcott, ed. by E. Dunning, J. Goudsblom, and S. Mennell, Oxford 2000.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent critique of Elias from a medievalist perspective, see B.H. Rosenwein, *Worrying about Emotions in History*, in «The American Historical Review», 107 (2002), pp. 821-845.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kilminster, *Norbert Elias: Post-philosophical Sociology*, London and New York 2007, pp. 10-13.

monastic and clerical *disciplina*<sup>4</sup>. Other historians take the “civilizing process” back to the French literature of courtly love, and Stephen Jaeger finds its origins even earlier in the Ottonian court of the tenth and eleventh centuries<sup>5</sup>. Studies focusing on northern Europe, however, have tended to neglect another, and perhaps more enduring, source of social discipline, namely, the medieval city, particularly the cities of north-central Italy<sup>6</sup>. It was not, after all, the monasteries but the cities that most urgently confronted, and at least partly achieved, the task of civilizing undisciplined upper classes. To be sure, echoes of religious *disciplina* and quotations from Hugh of St. Victor can be found in the non-clerical conduct texts that came from the medieval Italian cities. But these traces of monastic and courtly discipline provided occasional support for a vision of civility that was chiefly lay and civic and was buttressed by classical texts whose relevance to this urban culture was expanding in both the educational and political spheres. Its significant use of biblical lore was drawn less from monastic sources than directly from the Bible, particularly *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiasticus*, the latter itself a conduct book advising readers how to act in the world. The imposition of restraint and codes of behavior on Europe’s undisciplined elites began in the cities of north-central Italy. It was here, for the first time in European history, that non-noble classes challenged the power of knightly and feudal elites, slowly and sporadically, but ultimately to great effect, by defining, codifying, and legislating standards of behavior that modified the character of the aristocratic classes. Not the courts, not the monasteries, but the city-states – the self-governing communes – were the laboratories in which rules of conduct aimed at reining in the elite classes were crafted and applied, in law as well as in literature.

Unlike early modern conduct books, which came mainly from the elites themselves and, in texts like Castiglione’s *Libro del Cortegiano*, reflect idealized, but also conflicted, perceptions of the courts<sup>7</sup>, medieval conduct books

<sup>4</sup> D. Knox, *Disciplina: The Monastic and Clerical Origins of European Civility*, in *Renaissance Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Eugene F. Rice, Jr.*, ed. by J. Monfasani and R.G. Musto, New York 1991, pp. 107-135.

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals*, Philadelphia 1985; also Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200*, Philadelphia 1994.

<sup>6</sup> For a contribution that highlights the role of the cities, see D. Romagnoli, *Cortesia nella città: un modello complesso. Note sull’etica medievale delle buone maniere*, in *La città e la corte. Buone e cattive maniere tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*, ed. by D. Romagnoli, Milano 1991, pp. 21-70; also by D. Romagnoli, *Parlare a tempo e luogo: galatei prima del Galateo*, in *Educare il corpo, educare la parola nella trattatistica del Rinascimento*, ed. by G. Patrizi, A. Quondam, Roma 1998, pp. 43-63. A. Scaglione combines Jaeger’s approach with attention to Italy in *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, and Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance*, Berkeley 1991; the urban environment serves as background to part 4, “The Italian Scene”, pp. 167-276.

<sup>7</sup> See J. Najemy, *Arms and Letters: The Crisis of Courtly Culture in the Wars of Italy*, in *Italy and the European Powers: The Impact of War, 1500-1530*, ed. by C. Shaw, Leiden 2006, pp. 207-238.

mostly emerged from the non-aristocratic class that contemporaries called the *popolo*, particularly from notaries, judges, and those “merchant writers” who articulated the values of their urban world. The foundation of their influence was the cities’ burgeoning literacy, a cultural achievement that is not sufficiently recognized. According to Giovanni Villani, eight to ten thousand boys and girls were learning to read in an early fourteenth-century Florentine population variously estimated between 90,000 and 120,000 – numbers that point to a literacy rate among men as high as 70-80 percent and recently confirmed by a study of the declarations of household wealth in the Catasto a century later<sup>8</sup>. A smaller, but still sizeable, percentage of women could also read and write. Notaries and judges brought Roman history, law, literature, rhetoric, and moral philosophy into the culture of thirteenth-century Italy in vernacular translations, commentaries, political treatises, chronicles, city panegyrics, and conduct literature. Some of these works were written in the local vernaculars, and those written in Latin quickly received vernacular translations. Albertano da Brescia wrote in Latin between the 1230s and 1250s, but already between 1268 and 1278 no fewer than three translators rendered all or parts of his works into the vernacular<sup>9</sup>. Brunetto Latini, the central figure in the thirteenth-century Florentine literature of social discipline, wrote his encyclopedic *Tresor* in French while in exile; it too was soon translated into Tuscan (by Bono Giamboni or by Latini himself?). The rapidity with which these writings found their way into the vernacular underscores the appetite for such literature and its appeal to communal society.

Indicative of the centrality of literacy in the culture of the *popolo* is the frequent reiteration by thirteenth-century authors of the importance of reading. Knowledge, Albertano writes in his *Liber consolationis et consilii*, is gained through theory (*doctrina*) and practice (*usus* and *exercitium*), and if one’s studies pertain to knowledge of letters (*literalem scientiam*), «continual reading [*jugi lectione*]», accompanied by extensive reflection and memory training, is essential. He quotes Cassiodorus: «Aegrescit profecto ingenium, nisi jugi lectione reparetur [...] cum humilitate et mansuetudine»; and Hugh of St. Victor: «Bonus lector humilis esse debet et mansuetus et a curis malis et voluptatum illecebris alienus, diligens et sedulus». Writing too is necessary, as Albertano says in his own words (followed by a corroborating passage from Seneca): «Et certe non solum lectione, sed etiam scriptura reparari debet ingenium»<sup>10</sup>. In the next generation, Bonvesin de la Riva, the Milanese grammar teacher and author of the famous panegyric *De magnalibus Mediolani*, wrote several manuals of good conduct, including *De quinqua-*

<sup>8</sup> R. Black, *Literacy in Florence, 1427*, in *Florence and Beyond: Culture, Society and Politics in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by D.S. Peterson with D.E. Bornstein, Toronto 2008, pp. 195-210.

<sup>9</sup> A. Graham, *Who Read Albertanus? Insight from the Manuscript Tradition*, in *Albertano da Brescia. Alle origini del razionalismo economico, dell’umanesimo civile, della grande Europa*, ed. by F. Spinelli, Brescia 1996, pp. 69-82.

<sup>10</sup> *Albertani brixiensis Liber consolationis et consilii*, ed. by T. Sundby, London 1873, pp. 23-26.

*ginta curialitatibus ad mensam, Expositiones Catonis*<sup>11</sup>, and *Vita scholastica*, a poem on proper behavior for students that organizes its recommendations around the «quinque claves sapientiae»<sup>12</sup>: after fear of God and the duty to honor one's teacher, the third key is careful reading, followed by thoughtful questions and the training of memory<sup>13</sup>. In the mid-fourteenth century, the Florentine merchant Paolo da Certaldo began his *Libro di buoni costumi* by impressing these «cinque [...] chiavi della sapienza» on the «lettore che leggi e vuoi imparare gli ammaestramenti di questo libro e degli altri». Third among the five keys is, again, continuous reading:

che tu continuamente legghi molti libri con molto studio, però che leggere continuamente fa 'mparare molte cose; e chi molti libri legge, molte e nuove cose truova, e domandando, molto impara: e però sempre leggi e studia con molta sollecitudine<sup>14</sup>.

The communes accomplished a veritable educational revolution, and the widespread insistence on constant reading shows how deeply embedded the imperatives of literacy were in the *popolo's* culture.

Among the chief topics of the literature of social discipline was speech, understood as the foundation of social interaction and of the city itself, and admonitions concerning its use reveal the civic and political dimension of discipline. Albertano wrote a short treatise on the subject, the *Liber de doctrina dicendi et tacendi*, which became the most popular of his works<sup>15</sup>. It gives instruction in knowing when to speak, how to speak when appropriate, and when to be silent. Adapting a saying attributed to Solomon in *Proverbs* 25.28, Albertano likens the man who cannot control his speech to a defenseless city: «Ait enim Salomon: Sicut urbs patens et sine murorum ambitu, ita vir qui non potest cohibere spiritum suum in loquendo»<sup>16</sup>. Albertano particularly advises against offensive and abusive language because of its potential damage to the “state”:

requiras ne quid iniuriosum vel contumeliosum dicas vel facias [...] Iniurie namque et contumelie tam pessime sunt ut non solum cuilibet singulariter noceant, sed etiam regnum propter ea destructionem et mutationem quandoque patiatur.

Another manuscript includes «cities» in the warning that offensive language can spark political disturbances and overthrow of governments: «ut

<sup>11</sup> Bonvesin de la Riva, *Expositiones Catonis. Saggio di ricostruzione critica*, ed. by C. Beretta, Pisa 2000.

<sup>12</sup> R. Avesani, “Leggesi che cinque sono le chiave della sapienza”, in «Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale», 7 (1965), pp. 62-73.

<sup>13</sup> P.F. Gehl, *A Moral Art: Grammar, Society, and Culture in Trecento Florence*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1993, pp. 193-198; also Romagnoli, *Cortesia nella città*, pp. 58-60.

<sup>14</sup> Paolo da Certaldo, *Libro di buoni costumi*, in *Mercanti scrittori. Ricordi nella Firenze tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. by V. Branca, Milano 1986, pp. 3-4.

<sup>15</sup> Portions of two *volgarizzamenti* of the work, by Andrea da Grosseto and Soffredi del Grazia, are in *Volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento*, ed. by C. Segre, Torino 1964, pp. 131-171.

<sup>16</sup> Albertano da Brescia, *Liber de doctrina dicendi et tacendi. La parola del cittadino nell'Italia del Duecento*, ed. by P. Navone, Firenze 1998, p. 6.



non solum cuilibet noceant, sed et etiam civitatibus et regnis, quae propterea disturbance et mutationes patiuntur»<sup>17</sup>. Albertano also warns against «seditious» speech: «requiras ne quid seditiosum dicas, quia nichil est perniciosius in civitate quam seditio». Again, the other manuscript adds a few words that heighten the specific relevance of this advice to cities and citizens, equating «seditio» with «civium divisio»<sup>18</sup>, or factionalism. Whether these words were added by Albertano himself in a revision of an earlier draft, or by copyists who sought to make the urban political context explicit, they underscore how crucial it was thought to be for citizens to internalize rules and standards for tempering speech, especially in a society in which upper-class factionalism was an endemic problem.

Albertano's treatise on speech and silence enjoyed great success. Brunetto Latini summarized and translated most of it in book two, chapters 62-67, of the *Tresor*, quoting the same authorities and counseling the same prudence and moderation<sup>19</sup>. The civic dimension of controlling speech is especially prominent in Latini's *Tesoretto*, the allegorical poem whose second half dramatizes the education of a knight – «un bel cavaleiro» and hence a member of the elite class that prized its knighthoods – by personifications of the virtues. The lessons imparted by the Virtues are in effect a conduct book illustrating rules for how the knight «nel suo mistero / si dovesse portare». Of the twenty Virtues whose admonitions to the knight Brunetto overhears, he reports the recommendations of four. The names of these four – Cortesia (courtesy, or good manners), Larghezza (generosity), Leanza (loyalty, or faith), and Prodezza (prowess) – might suggest idealized values of courtly culture. But in fact they give lessons in moderation that presuppose a civic context. Larghezza is the first to advise the knight about restraint in speech, warning him against gambling, or, if his honor demands it, at least not to let bad luck or losses cause him to lose his temper and say anything offensive: «non dicer villania / né mal motto che sia». Cortesia gives the knight a more extended lesson in speech decorum that may have been borrowed directly from Albertano:

Che nel tuo parlamento / abbi provvedimento. / Non sia troppo parlante, / e pensati  
davante / quello che dir vorrai, / ché non retorna mai / la parola ch'è detta, / sì come  
la saetta / che va e non ritorna. / Chi ha la lingua adorna, / poco senno gli basta / se  
per follia no'l guasta.

Latini sets the knight's speech in a specifically urban and civic setting.

E l' detto sia soave / e guarda non sia grave / in dir ne' reggimenti, / ché non può a le  
genti / far più gravosa noia.

<sup>17</sup> Albertano, *Liber de doctrina dicendi*, p. 16: «civitibus et regnis» in Sundby's edition, as quoted by J.M. Powell, *Albertanus of Brescia: The Pursuit of Happiness in the Early Thirteenth Century*, Philadelphia 1992, p. 65, 72 n. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Albertano, *Liber de doctrina dicendi*, p. 18; Powell, *Albertanus*, p. 65, 72 n. 40: «nihil enim pernicios[i]us in civitate, quam seditio; ubi seditio, ibi civium divisio».

<sup>19</sup> Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, ed. by P.G. Beltrami, P. Squillacioti, P. Torri and S. Vatteroni, Torino 2007, pp. 466-487.

Speaking «ne' reggimenti» is clearly political speech, perhaps even in communal councils, as implied in the following warning:

non sia inizzatore / né sia redicitore / di quel ch'altra persona / davante a te ragiona; /  
né non usar rampogna / né dire altrui menzogna / né villania d'alcuno.

Cortesias is especially insistent that the knight avoid any public speech that injures others:

Né non sie sì sicuro / che pur un motto duro / ch'altra persona tocca / t'esca fuor de la  
bocca: / ché troppa sicuranza / fa contra buona usanza; / e chi sta lungo via / guardi di  
dir follia<sup>20</sup>.

As Vittore Branca noticed, this last warning evidently was (or became) proverbial, for Paolo da Certaldo echoes and amplifies it in the *Libro di buoni costumi* (333):

Sempre ti guarda, quando se' in casa altrui, di non dire male di quel cotale di cu' è la  
casa. Ancora ti guarda di non dire cosa lungo via o lungo parete d'assi o di sottile muro,  
che tu non voglia che ogni uomo il sappia.

Paolo then paraphrases the line from Latini's *Tesoretto*: «lungo via non dica follia»<sup>21</sup>. Walls and fences – and warnings about ears that might be listening on the other side – imply the thickly built environment of the medieval city. Even then, it seems, walls had big ears, and cities teemed with walls. Whether or not Paolo was aware that he was quoting Latini's *Tesoretto*, he confirms Villani's famous encomium of Latini for his skill in speaking («in bene sapere dire») and for being the «cominciatore e maestro in digrossare i fiorentini, e farli scorti in bene parlare, e in sapere guidare e reggere la nostra repubblica secondo la politica»<sup>22</sup>. The social control of speech recently studied in early modern contexts<sup>23</sup> had its origins in lessons in self-discipline in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Civilizing the knightly class, however, involved more than restraining speech and inculcating good manners. The ultimate objective was to limit its violence and factionalism.

Albertano da Brescia's *Liber consolationis et consilii* is a foundational text in the medieval literature of social discipline<sup>24</sup>. It is well known, at least

<sup>20</sup> Brunetto Latini, *Il Tesoretto*, ed. by M. Ciccuto, Milano 1985, pp. 95-96 (lines 1365-1369), pp. 97-98 (lines 1427-1446), pp. 102-103 (lines 1599-1640).

<sup>21</sup> *Mercanti scrittori*, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. by G. Porta, 3 vols., Parma 1990-1991, book 9, chapter 10, vol. 2, pp. 27-28.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, E. Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice*, Cambridge 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Useful approaches to the *Liber consolationis et consilii* include J. Powell, *Albertanus*, pp. 74-89; E. Artifoni, *Prudenza del consigliere. L'educazione del cittadino nel Liber consolationis et consilii di Albertano da Brescia (1246)*, in *Consilium. Teorie e pratiche del consigliare nella cultura medievale*, ed. by C. Casagrande, C. Crisciani, S. Vecchio, Firenze 2004, pp. 195-216; O. Nuccio, *I trattati ed i sermoni di Albertano da Brescia: fonti inesplorate dell' "umanesimo economico"*,

by reputation, to medievalists outside Italy because it was, perhaps at one remove, Geoffrey Chaucer’s source for the *Tale of Melibee*. Even if Chaucer used a fourteenth-century French version of Albertano’s dialogue<sup>25</sup>, the narrative of the *Tale of Melibee* is remarkably close to the *Liber consolacionis*. The transmission of the dialogue from Italy to France to England suggests that medieval Italian conduct literature had considerable appeal beyond the Alps.

The dialogue is between Melibeus, «vir potens et dives», and his wife Prudentia, who, after a book-length series of lessons and sermons on the virtues of prudence, persuades him not to exact revenge for the criminal attack of enemies who broke into his house during his absence and assaulted Prudentia and his daughter, severely injuring the latter. Melibeus is beside himself with rage and grief and cries inconsolably. Prudentia’s instruction begins with the control of emotion. Quoting from the twelfth-century comedy *Pamphilus de amore*, she advises Melibeus to allow «modus» – proper measure – and prudence to temper his grief: «Temperet ergo tuum modus et prudentia fletum»<sup>26</sup>. Melibeus acknowledges the wisdom of her advice, but his grief still paralyzes him. So Prudentia advises:

Convoca probatos ac fideles amicos, agnatos et cognatos, et ab eis super praedictis diligenter consilium postula, et secundum illorum consilium te regas<sup>27</sup>.

*Consilium* meant many things, including counsel, advice, wisdom and prudence, but to citizens of the communes Prudentia’s suggestion also clearly alluded to the communal councils, the deliberative assemblies that approved and sometimes debated legislation. Melibeus convenes a «multitudinem hominum copiosam», including the town’s physicians, surgeons, learned advocates («causidici sapientes») and a variety of friends, neighbors, and citizens, explains his desire for revenge, and asks their opinion. The doctors respond that, because their duty is to heal without regard to factional divisions, they are against vendettas<sup>28</sup>. But Melibeus’s neighbors, among them «adulatores quoque sive assentatores», feed his grief and wounded honor, urging him not only to pursue vendetta but indeed to wage war «viriliter» against his enemies. One of the advocates (Albertano’s own profession) rises to say that the matter is difficult and dangerous because of the

in *Albertano da Brescia*, pp. 95-155 (pp. 136-152); A. Zorzi, *La cultura della vendetta nel conflitto politico in età comunale*, in *Le storie e la memoria. In onore di Arnold Esch*, ed. by R. Delle Donne, A. Zorzi, Firenze 2002, pp. 135-170; and J.-C. Maire Vigueur, *Cavaliers et citoyens. Guerre, conflits et société dans l'Italie communale, XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris 2003, pp. 316-324.

<sup>25</sup> See J. Burke Severs, *The Source of Chaucer’s Melibeus*, in «PMLA - Publications of the Modern Language Association», 50 (1935), pp. 92-99; C.A. Owen, Jr., *The Tale of Melibee*, in «The Chaucer Review», 7 (1973), pp. 267-280 (p. 268, n. 3). But see also P. Olson, *The Canterbury Tales and the Good Society*, Princeton 1986, pp. 114, 119-120; and Powell, *Albertanus*, p. 7, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolacionis*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolacionis*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolacionis*, p. 7: «non expedit eis de guerra vel vindicta consulere, nec inter aliquos partem capere, quare de vindicta facienda minime tibi consulimus».

proximity, wealth, and power of the opposing factions<sup>29</sup> and that Melibeus should not act rashly. Albertano here presupposes the reader's familiarity with the urban political context in which factions, led by members of wealthy elite families and supported by followers and clients, often divided cities and threw them into civil war. The young men in attendance carry the day with angry, emotional calls for vengeance and war, drowning out the last-minute appeal for calm by a wise elder. Melibeus calls for a vote – the text even mimics the language of legislative procedure in communal councils: «facto inter eos more solito partito»<sup>30</sup> – and gets a majority in favor of his desire for vendetta.

Prudentia intervenes and asks Melibeus to listen. He first responds, even to the suggestion of taking her advice, with traditional misogyny, each point of which she calmly refutes and counters with more reasons why women's counsel should be heard, valued, and implemented. «Si prudenter vis vivere», she intones, «te prudentiam oportet habere»<sup>31</sup>. Melibeus yields – indeed, at every point in the dialogue he at first resists and then yields – and asks his wife to explain what prudence is, the different kinds of prudence, what its effects are, and how it can be acquired. Personifications of the virtues as women were neither new nor unusual, but the striking aspect of this dialogue is that the role of teacher of moderation and discipline is given not just to a woman, but to the wife of a powerful, rich man intent upon violent revenge against his enemies. Albertano thus genders his civilizing project as feminine and makes it emerge from a domestic setting. But the class dimension is no less evident. Although not from a large family, Melibeus belongs to the urban plutocracy and has the financial resources to assemble a faction of friends and supporters. Whereas the doctors and judges advise against vendetta, or at least counsel delay and reflection, the neighbors and young men – «flatterers and sycophants» who constitute Melibeus's *clientela* – pander to his bellicose instincts and instigate him to violence. In ultimately persuading Melibeus to abandon vendetta, Prudentia obstructs his “natural” reactions and neutralizes the faction's emotional response to his appeal for support.

Prudentia's arguments are broadly applicable lessons in moral philosophy, laced with frequent quotations, indeed chains of quotations, from a wide variety of sources including Cicero, Seneca, Martial, Ovid, the *Disticha Catonis*, Cassiodorus, Pietro Alfonsi, Hugh of St. Victor, Roman law, and two books of the Bible: *Proverbs* (“Solomon”) and *Ecclesiasticus* (to which Albertano refers by the name of its author, “Jhesus Sirac”). And these are only the literary sources most often cited. But Prudentia's lessons also speak to the specific context of the Italian cities, addressing in particular the neces-

<sup>29</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, p. 8: «Arduum etiam est ratione vicinitatis et divitiarum ac potentiae utriusque partis».

<sup>30</sup> Sundby's edition, p. 11, has «facta [...] partita».

<sup>31</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, p. 19.

sity of curtailing abuses of power typical of the urban elite and strengthening public authority in the punishment of crime and control of violence. She gives ample instruction on *consilium* – whose to seek, whose to avoid, and how to evaluate it – in the course of which its meaning as advice or counsel slides into its institutional sense as a forum of public deliberation, hence also council. Prudentia warns that the perverted emotions of «cupiditas» and «voluptas» must be avoided «in consiliis», for they can cause «patriae prodiones» and «rerum publicarum eversiones»<sup>32</sup>, thus undermining public authority. The 1268 vernacular translation by Andrea da Grosseto highlights still more explicitly this political context and identifies the *res publicae* of the Latin text with the communal governments of the cities: uncontrolled cupidity and desire can cause «tradimenti de le Terre» and precipitate «le soversione de’ Comuni e de le cose del Comune»<sup>33</sup>.

Prudentia preaches civil sociability as essential to both the responsible citizen and the healthy city. She quotes Cassiodorus (*Variae* 1.39): «Illi prudentiores semper sunt habiti, qui multorum hominum conversationibus probantur eruditi»<sup>34</sup>. This may include actual conversations, but the wider meaning is the importance of being familiar with, and skilled in, social mores and relations. Here too, Andrea da Grosseto expands the meaning of Albertano’s Latin, referring to those who have «usato e imparato in custumi di molta gente»<sup>35</sup>. Andrea’s inclination to underscore the civic dimension emerges again when he translates a passage that Albertano quotes from “Solomon” (*Proverbs* 11.14) on the necessity of a «gubernator»: a good navigator, pilot, ruler, or governor. The Vulgate says: «Ubi non est gubernator, populus corruet; salus autem, ubi multa consilia». Andrea changes «gubernator» to «governamento» and writes that where there is no «governamento», the *popolo* goes to ruin and that safety lies in many «consigli», which can be understood as many sources of wise counsel, but also as a multiplicity of councils (of the sort that Prudentia twice advises Melibeus to convene)<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, the point may be that there is no difference, since the best advice comes from councils where many can offer their counsel. Prudentia continues to elide the two senses of *consilium*. She tells Melibeus that he got bad «consilium» from a gathering that should not be called a «consilium» because it was easily manipulated by emotional appeals and lacking in foresight and judgment<sup>37</sup>. He invited too many people: he should have begun with

<sup>32</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> *Dei trattati morali di Albertano da Brescia: volgarizzamento inedito fatto nel 1268 da Andrea da Grosseto*, ed. by F. Selmi, Bologna 1873, p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, p. 44.

<sup>35</sup> *Trattati morali*, pp. 87–88.

<sup>36</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, p. 45; *Trattati morali*, p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, p. 64: «consilium, quod dicis tibi datum, non potuit dici consilium, sed [...] fuit quaedam arreatio sive contionatio improvida et indiscreta». *Trattati morali*, pp. 105–106: «Sappi addunque che ‘l consiglio che tu di’ che ti fu dato [...] non si può dir consiglio; ma fu un aringamento o un parlamento inprovidemente e indiscretamente fatto».

a few advisers and, if necessary, asked for more. He made the mistake of inviting malicious, young, and foolish men (those «adulatores» and «assentatores») instead of good, wise, and older friends of proven loyalty. He thus followed the «voluntatem ac sensum multitudinis stultorum atque errantium». Prudentia establishes another link to the communal councils when she says that «in partitis, quae in consiliis civitatum fieri consueverunt» *consilia* always come to a bad end if the will of the multitude is followed instead of the wisdom of the few<sup>38</sup>. Prudentia (like Albertano, we may surmise) is evidently not an advocate of broadly based government, but her warning to her husband to consult and follow the advice of the right people is nonetheless a lesson in the proper institutional arrangements of the commune. Central to the “civilizing” of her husband is his instruction in the ethics and regulations of civic life. In short, she attempts to make him a citizen.

Prominent among the lessons Prudentia urges on Melibeus is that vendetta, or retribution, is a prerogative of public authority. This surprisingly precocious expression of the distinction between public prosecution of crime and private revenge demanded by honor would remain an incompletely fulfilled objective for a long time<sup>39</sup>. But Prudentia explains that the advice Melibeus received from his friends concerning vendetta «certe non est consentaneum rationi», because «de jure vindicta nulli nisi iudici jurisdictionem habenti permittitur»<sup>40</sup>. Melibeus protests that, without vendetta, «maleficia» would go unpunished, and, moreover, that «multa enim bona proveniunt ex vindicta», for evildoers are killed and others deterred from committing similar crimes. Prudentia agrees that crimes must not go unpunished and that punishment can indeed deter potential malefactors. But the right to punish, she insists, using the language of Roman law, rests with

judicibus imperium vel jurisdictionem habentibus; ad illos namque pertinet malefactores puniendo vindictam exercere ac malos homines terrere.

She goes further to say that «sicut quilibet singulariter vindictam faciendo peccaret, ita iudex vindictam omittendo non esset a peccato immunis»<sup>41</sup>. Prudentia thus affirms not only the right, but also the duty, of

<sup>38</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, pp. 65-66; *Trattati morali*, p. 108: «i partiti che si prendono ne' consigli de le gran città, sempre vengono ad male efetto, se vogliono seguitare pur la volontà de la moltitudine e non lo sapere di pochi».

<sup>39</sup> The obligation of the communes to prosecute crimes was still being debated in the mid-fourteenth century; see S. Lepsius, *Public Responsibility for Failure to Prosecute Crime? An Inquiry into an Umbrian Case by Bartolo da Sassoferrato*, in *A Renaissance of Conflicts: Visions and Revisions of Law and Society in Italy and Spain*, ed. by J.A. Marino and T. Kuehn, Toronto 2004, pp. 131-170.

<sup>40</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, p. 78; *Trattati morali*, p. 122: «che per ragione possa far vendetta se non giudicie, ad cui per ragione sia conceduto».

<sup>41</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, pp. 86-87; *Trattati morali*, pp. 132-133: «anno luogo ne giudici ch' anno licencia e signoria di punire li malifattori et di spaurare li rei uomini [...] Et anche ti dico più, che, secondo che ciascheduno huomo, facciendo vendetta per se, farebbe peccato; così l' giudicie, quando egli lascia che non fa una vendetta, non è senza peccato».

communal judges to prosecute crime and carry out public vendetta: «Vindictam ergo iudex facere debet puniendo homines corporaliter et pecunialiter». Judges must sometimes inflict the most extreme punishments:

Judex ergo potest et debet cum severitate facinorosos necare, mulctare, castigare, bonis spoliare nec pati suum imperium in aliquo contempni.

This last phrase is of central importance: the judge must never allow his «imperium» – his public authority – to be disdained or disparaged, for, as Prudentia explains to Melibeus, vendetta belongs «ad solum Deum vel ad iudicem secularem, et non ad te vel ad alium singulariter». If Melibeus wants vendetta, he must have recourse to a judge with «jurisdictionem vel imperium», who «justitia mediante adversarios tuos debita cohercione punire non tardabit»<sup>42</sup>.

Prudentia permits self-defense but dismisses as useless the towers and fortifications built by elite families for battles against opposing factions and which made many communes veritable forests of private fortifications. When Prudentia asks how Melibeus understood the advice he was given «ut domum tuam diligenter munias», he says he took it to mean he should «munire domum meam turribus et aliis altis aedificiis» to ensure safety and frighten away enemies. No, she replies, fortifying oneself with towers and tall buildings «ad superbiam plerumque pertinet»; it generates fear and hate, with the result that your neighbors, once friends, become your enemies. «Turres cum magno labore et infinitis expensis fiunt», she says, and they are of little use unless defended with the help of prudent and faithful friends, and again at great expense. Melibeus wonders how he can fortify his home if not with towers, to which Prudentia replies that «munitio» can mean different things: «Est enim munitio quae ad dilectionem pertinet, ut amor civium». This kind of fortification, she explains with a quotation from Cicero, is «inexpugnabilis»<sup>43</sup>. Prudentia ultimately converts Melibeus to an acceptance of civic sociability and «amor civium», but it takes the whole of the book-length dialogue to overcome his counterarguments and backsliding.

In the *Tesoretto* Brunetto Latini's Virtues give the wandering knight a similar lesson that culminates with a warning from Prodezza about not rushing into violence:

Dicoti apertamente / che tu non sie corrente / a far né a dir follia, / ché, per la fede mia,  
/ non ha presa mi' arte / chi segue folle parte.

<sup>42</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, pp. 87-88; *Trattati morali*, pp. 134-135. Zorzi, in *La cultura della vendetta* cit. (above, note 24), reads the dialogue as a defense of the legitimacy of vendetta, in part because Albertano applies «vindicta» to both public and private acts of retribution. But Prudentia still insists that vendetta belongs only to the communal judges (or to God), and in the end she dissuades Melibeus from carrying out his vendetta «singulariter».

<sup>43</sup> Albertano, *Liber consolationis*, pp. 72-74; *Trattati morali*, pp. 114-117.

Prodezza denies the knight the honor he expects from his code of knightly behavior:

E guàrdati ognora / che tu non facci ingiura / né forza a om vivente: / quanto se' più potente, / cotanto più ti guarda, / ché la gente non tarda / di portar mala boce / a om che sempre noce.

If he suffers a wrong, he should defend his «ragion», but, whenever possible, resolve disputes through legal means:

Di tanto ti conforto / che, se t'è fatto torto, / arditamente e bene / la tua ragion mantene. / Ben ti consiglio questo: / che, se tu col ligisto / atartene potessi, / vorria che lo facessi, / ch'egli è maggior prodezza / rinfronar la mattezza / con dolci motti e piani / che venire a le mani<sup>44</sup>.

Like Albertano's Prudentia, Latini's Prodezza permits self-defense. If no other solution is available and vendetta is necessary, the knight should fight with all his strength and resources. But even with his enemies he must conduct himself «cortesemente»:

nolli mostrare asprezza / né villana fierezza / dàlli tutta la via / però che maestria / afina più l'ardire / che non fa pur ferire / ... maestria conchiude / la forza e la vertude / e fa 'ndugiar vendetta / e alungar la fretta / e mettere in obria / e atutar follia<sup>45</sup>.

Central to the self-control that Prodezza preaches to the knight are the notions of *arte* and *maestria*. Both Albertano and Latini associate *arte* with self-restraint and the mastery of self that is fundamental to “civilizing” discipline. *Arte* meant skill, profession, and trade, hence also guild, and more generally organized knowledge that could be learned and taught and whose rules and norms molded its practitioners. Albertano's *De amore et dilectione Dei et proximi* includes a chapter («De artibus diligendis») on why *artes* must be loved: offering a fanciful etymology, he affirms that «ars dicitur ab arcendo, eo quod ad ipsam tamquam ad aliquod certum homo arcetur». This apparently seemed a little murky to Andrea da Grosseto, who adds that *arcendo* has the same meaning as *constringo* and understands Albertano's sentence to mean that a man «si costringe» by his «arte» as by a thing most certain<sup>46</sup>. Andrea was obviously trying to emphasize the sense in which an *arte* shapes or forms the character of those who practice it. Albertano continues: «Est autem ars infinitorum infinitum compendium, vel ars est collectio preceptorum ad unum finem tendentium». He urges his readers to love the *artes* and make every effort to acquire them, for it is through them that «vita hominis instruitur atque defenditur» and that wealth is obtained. Even without wealth, «artes ita preciose sunt quod non reliquunt hominem usque in

<sup>44</sup> Latini, *Tesoretto*, pp. 113-114 (lines 1985-2014).

<sup>45</sup> Latini, *Tesoretto*, pp. 116-117 (lines 2089-2104).

<sup>46</sup> Albertano da Brescia, *De l'amore e de la dilezione di Dio e dell'altre cose*, in *Trattati morali*, pp. 326-327.



mortem»<sup>47</sup>. A similar sense of *arte* as formative and disciplining appears in Paolo da Certaldo. Because «la villa fa buone bestie e cattivi uomini», one should go there infrequently; «usala poco: sta a la città, e favvi o arte o mercatantia».

Se tu hai figliuoli assai, polli [*ponili*] a più arti, e non tutti a una, in però che non possono essere tutti d'uno animo. Domandagli catuno di per sé quale arte o mestiere e' vuole fare, e a quella il poni.

Paolo several times uses the proverbial expression «l'uomo che ha arte ha buona parte». Echoing Albertano, he asserts that «chi ha arte, ha tal parte che mai da sé non si disparte, cioè da lui» and that «niuna ricchezza è più stabile e più sicura a l'uomo che l'arte»<sup>48</sup>.

A compatible but more theoretical notion of *arte* likewise pervades the political sections of Latini's *Tresor*<sup>49</sup>. «Politique» («politica» in the Tuscan translation) is itself a «mestier», both a profession and a teacher, and

la plus haute science et dou plus noble mestier qui soit entre les homes, car ele nos enseigne gouverner les estranges genz d'un reingne et d'une vile, .i. peuple et une comune.

«Politique» also teaches «totes les ars et toz les mestiers que a vie d'ome sont beseignables»<sup>50</sup>; it «enseigne la cité gouverner» and is the «principal et souveraine et dame de toutes ars, por ce que desox lui sont contenues maintes honorables ars». It is «noble por ce que elle met en ordre et adrece toutes ars qui souz lui sont». Thus the «arts» that instill discipline are themselves given «order and direction» by «politica», which is realizable only in the city. The good citizen is (and must be) an *artier* – one who practices an *art* – because those who learn their art well live by its rules and are shaped by them.

Le droit enseingnement si est que l'en aille selonc ce que sa nature peut soffrir; ce est a dire que celui qui enseigne geometrie doit aler par ses argumenz,

and similarly with other skills, for «chascun artier juge bien et dit la verité de ce qui appartient a son mestier, et en ce est son sens soutil». Latini contrasts the *artier* who lives by his *arte*, which generates in him truth-telling and sound judgment, with the man «qui ensive ses volonteiz»<sup>51</sup>. The discipline of *arte* tames errant desires and instills the moderation and justice needed

<sup>47</sup> In Andrea da Grosseto's translation, the title of this chapter is “Come si debono amare le ricchezze” (*Trattati morali*, p. 326), obviously reflecting Albertano's emphasis on the *artes* as the foundation of prosperity.

<sup>48</sup> Paolo da Certaldo, *Libro di buoni costumi*, in *Mercanti scrittori*, 103 (p. 19), 124 (p. 25), 217 (p. 43), 327 (pp. 69-70); also 380 (pp. 95-96).

<sup>49</sup> For this reading of Latini's political language, see J. Najemy, *Brunetto Latini's Politica*, in «Dante Studies», 112 (1994), pp. 33-51.

<sup>50</sup> Latini, *Tresor*, 1.4, p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Latini, *Tresor*, 2.3, p. 334.

for civil life: «Et artiers s'efforcent a tenir mileu en ses ars et deguerpir les estremités»<sup>52</sup>. Citizens living together in a city «s'entreservent li uns a l'autre», for those who need something another person has receives it and gives him his reward and payment according to the quality of the thing, «jusques a tant que il soient en droite moieneté entr'iaus»<sup>53</sup>, for

Justice est mi entre gaignier et perdre, et ne puet estre sens doner et prendre et changer, car le drapier done drap por autre chose dont il a mestier, et li fevre done fer por autre chose<sup>54</sup>.

Justice was the ideological core of popular governments in the Italian communes, and for Latini it was a product of the practices and customs of fair exchange among practitioners of trades. Governors of cities («l'ome qui gouverne les citez») must also have *arte* («en les griés choses covient avoir art») in order to achieve the purpose of bringing delight to citizens in appropriate things and at appropriate times and places<sup>55</sup>. The commune and its government, made up of many arts, is thus also an *arte* – a community defined and shaped by norms and rules that discipline its citizens. Intriguingly, the Tuscan translation of the *Tresor* renders the phrase «l'ome qui gouverne les cités» as the «artefice della scienza civile» – the artisan, guildsman, or professional practitioner of civic wisdom<sup>56</sup>, thus explicitly linking the “civility” of city life to the discipline of *arte*.

The aristocratic classes of the communes did not of course spontaneously convert to this “civility” upon reading, if they ever did, the works of Albertano and Latini, books that no doubt received greater attention from those seeking to control unruly elites than from the elites themselves. It required the sometimes harsh law and coercive power of popular governments to limit the violence of powerful families and factions. Florence's first popular government (whose chancellor was Brunetto Latini) tore down, or reduced the height of, those family towers that Albertano's Prudentia considered a provocation to hatred and violence. Popular governments in many cities designated knightly families as magnates, deprived them of office-holding rights, and subjected them to harsh penalties for certain violent crimes. Elite classes often regained power with their usual weapons of intimidation, factions, private armies, foreign connections, and *clientelismi*, but by the second half of the fourteenth century, and certainly by the fifteenth, their habits and ways of exercising power had changed, as they were gradually transformed into civic and ultimately courtly aristocracies. The courtly societies of the Renaissance were made possible by – and would not

<sup>52</sup> Latini, *Tresor*, 2.15, pp. 350-352.

<sup>53</sup> Latini, *Tresor*, 2.29, p. 384.

<sup>54</sup> Latini, *Tresor*, 2.38, p. 398.

<sup>55</sup> Latini, *Tresor*, 2.12, p. 348.

<sup>56</sup> J.B. Holloway, *Twice-Told Tales: Brunetto Latini and Dante Alighieri*, New York 1993, p. 437.

have happened without – the “civilizing process” pursued by the communes and popular governments of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a process to which the writings of Albertano da Brescia, Brunetto Latini, and others made decisive contributions.